University of California Education Abroad Program’s Student Focus Groups in Support of Strategic Planning

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Introduction: Purpose of Study

In 2010-11 the University of California Education Abroad Program (UCEAP) announced a broad strategic planning exercise in support its vision of:

1. Study Abroad for All
2. Academic Excellence, &
3. Best Business Practices

As an academic program designed to impart international education to UC students, it was determined that UC students should inform strategic plan initiatives or tactics so as to optimally pursue this vision for UC students. To this end, focus groups were organized at four UC campuses representing a cross-section of institutional perspectives within our student population (UC Davis, UC Los Angeles, UC San Diego, & UC Santa Barbara). Multiple 90 minute sessions were held at each institution with students who were predominantly:

1. Upper-class in academic standing and who had a familiarity with UCEAP -- by fact of their having initiated an application to UCEAP -- but who had not participated in study abroad with UCEAP, and
2. Lower-class in academic standing and who had not previously initiated an application to UCEAP

In all, 62 students participated in the focus groups, 36 who had initiated a UCEAP application, and 26 who had not. These students were largely recruited by the UC campus offices for study abroad, and focus group subjects were given a modest incentive for their participation.

This report interprets the collection of focus group data, rather than presenting a mere sequence of conversations. As well as any conversation or focus group is moderated, statements by subjects and conversations between subjects will naturally include reflections upon previous statements of the group. The interpretation of themes as trends and commonalities within and across groups reduces redundancy and allows us to efficiently portray the range of ideas and opinions of our subjects or, when practical, a simple representation of the clear majority. What is more, this approach allows us to incorporate information from other resources – namely program evaluations and surveys of UCEAP’s applicants, participants, and parents of participants – and to effectively continue the process of refining the results as future evidence comes forward from the research that all UCEAP staff members contribute to as part of their daily pursuit of excellence at UCEAP.
Findings Brief

Program Essentials:
It is essential that UCEAP prove to UC students that it truly is an academic program by producing units that fulfill their immediate academic major(s), minor(s), or other degree requirements. Anything less is a waste of their time, their money, and their energy that could be spent in other worthy opportunities that vigorously compete for their attention. These sentiments are informed by parents, who largely fund their student’s education and critically impact participation decisions.

- Our UC students maintain that Summer, or Summer and Fall terms, are the optimal periods to pursue study abroad
- They prefer other forms of instruction over on-line learning
- Students demand other returns for their investment in study abroad, namely cultural acquisition in the form of language skills, & social prestige through other distinct achievements abroad that can have potential career benefit.

Program Choices:
For their time invested in study abroad, UC Students know that there are many options available to them within the UC system. But they are not necessarily clear about what these choices are or what the differences are between these programs. Although the UC brand brings to UCEAP a certain credibility that has value, UC students are not hesitant to give their investment in study abroad to other providers, including non-UC providers, if their personal agenda for study abroad gives this option more value.

- Our market position is unclear to UC students
- Even program participants are uncertain as to the financial value of UCEAP programs
- In the eyes of our students, UCEAP does not currently have programs for all UC students
- Choices about programs are strongly influenced by the student’s network of peers, friends, past participants, UC staff, and parents. Not all influencers’ opinions are necessarily valued equally at different decision or choice moments

Learning about Programs:
As students develop knowledge about study abroad programs, they begin to have motives for different types of information about programs. Some communication tools are better at delivering institutional knowledge and require institutional ownership. Other tools are for non-institutional content and require only an institutional support and carefully balanced participation.
“Technical” information is the language students use to describe what they want the UCEAP institutional resources and staff to deliver by print, website, and in any other official presentation

Social media such as Facebook is currently the arena students prefer for connecting and sharing with one another

When administrators do participate in Facebook they need to balance their presence against the subject under discussion and the amount of institutional presence students will tolerate

UCEAP’s new website design is appealing to students, though some elements could be confusing and will require monitoring for effectiveness, and there are student interests in having tools added to the website that will make it easier for them to understand the process to participation

Making Decisions About Programs:

At most critical decision points, students are confronting academic and financial obstacles. Through their personal networks students are usually partially informed of UCEAP or study abroad opportunities in matters academic or financial. Sometimes they are working from intuitive ideas about the cost of travel and education. Students also have a wide array of personal obstacles they need to overcome in order to participate in study abroad and look to UCEAP or any provider to make the process to participation easier for them.

Financial obstacles are as significant as academic demands

UC students are aware that not all Financial Aid is equal and do not want to be encumbered with debt that results from irresponsible decisions

Fears of isolation, home-sickness, reverse culture shock, selecting the right program, and adjustment to a foreign institution and culture are sensitive subjects with UC students, common if not widespread among applicants, and though difficult to address present an opportunity for UCEAP to serve students

Other logistical and practical concerns can become obstacles to participation – matters of housing, transportation, visas, application requirements, and the need to maintain their immediate academic arena as they prepare for another – and can reduce the best intended applicant’s chances of participation to nothing.
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Essentials of Study Abroad: Units for Degree

Students don’t want to waste time, and this is especially the case when studying abroad. They want courses and their units to be applied to their transcripts and to contribute to their UC GPA. In short, course articulation and academic integration of study abroad courses coalesce in the minds of students with financial and other matters to inform their academic planning. For a majority of students, academic integration includes degree requirements (e.g., major, General Education/Breadth, etc.) and is a basis of their participation decisions.

Figure 1: Comparison of Courses Taken Abroad Applying to or Not Applying to Transcript & GPA (Focus Group Exercise 1)

Courses Taken Abroad Would NOT Likely Apply To Transcript & GPA / Courses Taken Abroad Would Likely Apply To Transcript & GPA

“*The units and the classes that are offered: Are they transferable or do they count toward your major? So you don’t waste time.*” (UCLA, No Application Initiated)

“*The big thing for me is classes that are compatible and that are going to transfer. Getting credit for classes is one of my biggest concerns.*” (UCSB, Initiated)

“*We have little information about what courses transfer. There is no guarantee of major credit when you return.*” (UCD, Initiated)

These sentiments strongly agree with the collective opinion collected in program evaluations. Over the past three years, and with more than 8,000 student responses, 77% of students are satisfied overall with their UCEAP academic experience abroad. But that figure improves to 95% when students are satisfied with coursework related to their major(s) and advances to 99% when they express satisfaction with both coursework related to their major(s) and General Education or Breadth requirements.
The last quotation given above provides a compelling statement for program design and outreach content. Students (and their families) want it all: a guarantee in advance of participation that their investment of time and money in study abroad will be useful, productive, and enjoyable.

“A lot of unknown factors and risks; people are uneasy about because they don’t know. I don’t want to mess up graduating. Even though it is a fun thing to do and it’s rewarding to a lot of people, there are a lot of risks...” (UCSB, Initiated)

In our surveys of parents, they have stated as a matter of fact that: “Sending your child abroad is a big family decision.” And if courses are not integrated to their student’s major(s) and other degree requirements, some will revisit the investment in time abroad: “Coursework abroad did not offer all classes to advance student’s major. Therefore, student was unable to stay abroad for an entire year. In other words, student had to return to home school in order to get necessary classes to complete requirements for major in 4 years.”

The degree to which academic progress can influence participation is disguised by the relatively low traffic our website receives for searches by Major or Discipline (5.3% of all clicks, Cf., Image 1). Among parents, concern for units is almost as much a concern as it was while their student was abroad (Cf., Figure 2, below). In a time of steep tuition increases, the financial implications of failed course integration do not escape their attention.

“Our daughter’s grades and transcripts were not posted in a timely manner, which is now causing her to attend summer school (at an additional cost to us) in order to graduate...”

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1 Statements by parents collected in our Spring 2011 Parent Survey.
Essentials of Study Abroad: Programs Without Academic Conflicts

Many students who want to study abroad often experience difficulties finding time in their academic schedule or program.

"I've always been interested [in study abroad] but it's trying to find the time to do it." (UCLA, No Application Initiated)

To address this problem, students from different campuses, academic disciplines, & levels of familiarity with UCEAP suggested that Summer, “or maybe Summer & Fall,” were the only “real times” they had available to study abroad. Otherwise, they perceived the commitment required for a full year abroad as too great. For the majority of UC undergraduates (85%) a quarter-based approach to time of instruction defines their UC experience. An admitted short-coming of our focus groups is the absence of representation by either of the semester-based institutions (UCB, UCM); time available for study abroad might look slightly or even significantly different to these populations.

As it is, the results of the focus group suggest that Year-length participation is a market that requires institutional strategy to develop as it is not an immediately perceived need or preference for the vast majority of students. This fact is made clear by recent participation trends (Cf., Figures 3 & 4, below). In just a few years, UCEAP has seen Summer and Semester & Quarter length programs replace the year abroad as the dominant length of program participation.
Figure 3: Percentage of UCEAP Participation by Academic Year and Length as Year or Summer/Semester/Quarter

Figure 4: UCEAP Participation by Academic Year and Length as Summer, Year or Semester/Quarter
"Some classes are only offered one quarter per year and so you have to work study abroad around those courses you need. If I miss one, then I have to wait for the next year. I'm scared to run out of time." (UCSB, No Application Initiated)

"For a lot of majors, classes are sequential and are only offered one quarter a year. You are stuck in your schedule." (UCD, Initiated)

Our focus group participants did not voice alternatives to this particular obstacle of study abroad. Elements of the first exercise that might have prompted the conversations to include creative solutions – the subjects of UC courses abroad & online instruction (Cf., figures 5 & 6 below) – were unsuccessful. Very few subjects gave an emphasis to course instruction “not taught at the UC,” and the more academically advanced subjects were the more interested they were in having us “provide courses similar to UC.” What is more, the use of online courses seemed to perturb the groups. Several subjects asked questions about the subject, and one adamantly stated: “Online courses defeats the whole purpose of study abroad, going to a university and getting an education.” The idea that an online course could complement UC degree requirements and study abroad or thus afford students the opportunity for study abroad is not necessarily an intuitive insight or direction in their thought.

Figure 5: Comparison of Courses Offered That Are Not Taught at UC vs. Courses Offered That Are Similar to UC (Focus Group Exercise 1)
Figure 6: Comparison of Online Self-Paced Classes vs. In Classroom Exchange (Focus Group Exercise 1)

The general opinion from students in the focus groups is that if you go abroad for the Spring semester, the units you earn will not equal the same amount of units as you would earn in two quarters. Again, the perception of the subjects and the reality of academic integration or lack thereof are informing them where perhaps UCEAP could be leading. In short, Spring semester will delay their time to degree or require that they make up the units lost in some other way.

"If someone were to study abroad for spring semester, the units don't really equate to two quarters. I need to graduate" (UCSD, Initiated)

For some, a short-term study abroad program is the only option that they feel will fit into their academic schedule. With 87% of students enrolling in semester length or shorter programs in 2010-11, there is an obvious high demand for short-term programs, and especially short-term programs that meet academic objectives.

Essentials of Study Abroad: Cultural Acquisition & Linguistic Advancement

When students consider investing in study abroad, they look for more than studying abroad. For nearly all focus group respondents study abroad is first and foremost about cultural acquisition. This ideal is also supported by our most recent “Perceptions Survey” of UCEAP applicants (and respondents are mostly participants before departure), in which students overwhelmingly agree to the statement that UCEAP “offers insights about other cultures” (Cf., Table 1, below).
Table 1: Perceptions of UCEAP’s Identity (Perceptions Survey, Spring 2010)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perceptions Survey Spring 2010: “EAP Is…”</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Don’t Know</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Well Regarded in my Academic Major(s)</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>99%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical to my Academic Goals</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>99%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offers Insights About Other Cultures</td>
<td>92%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>99%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Too Expensive for Most Students</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>99%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Distinctive Academic Achievement</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>99%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Culture is a difficult matter to define, and the uses of cultural acquisition are also varied. That being said, within our focus group participants, culture is a diverse subject that is fun to explore, that can bring surprising, unique, and sometimes personal benefits. As there is no one advantage driving this pursuit of cultural acquisition, it is also diversely held, and at times seemingly contradictorily or creatively held by the same individual, as a personal pursuit, a casual accident of time spent abroad, or even a social service one performs (e.g., as an ambassador of American culture). Translating cultural acquisition into tangible or specific benefits is rarely made by focus group subjects, but when tendered they note language acquisition or refinement of language skills, an understanding of one’s origins as seen from another point of view, social prestige, and career enhancement as cultural benefits.

“Ample opportunity to pursue self-interests. I want to be able to take part in culture. Ideally I’d want to be able to do my own thing there.” (UCSD, Initiated)

“Getting to experience a different culture, living with the people… If you go to a place that speaks a foreign language you might be able to learn some of it.” (UCSB, Initiated)

“You become an ambassador to (sic) your culture.” (UCD, Initiated)

“The benefit of study abroad, immersing ourselves in a different culture, seeing the world, a chance to travel.” (UCD, No Application Initiated)

“Going abroad you get more cultured and well-rounded; some companies look at things other than grades. Being able to travel and talk to people, networking helps.” (UCSB, No Application Initiated)

If nothing else, students hold the perception that UCEAP is a “Good Opportunity to Travel” and explore the world around them (Cf., Table 2.). But the use of travel as a program component is open to interpretation. The younger segment of our focus group is much more interested in programs that spread the time abroad between multiple locations. Among those with advanced academic standing, and who had initiated an application to UCEAP, there is a larger desire to become immersed in another culture but one could not say that this is a dominant characteristic within this segment of our subjects. For them, the opportunity to travel
is not so much a lost interest as it is a less desirable construct of the program itself (Cf., Figure 7, below).

“Killing two birds with one stone. Fulfilling academic requirements while traveling.”
(UCLA, No Application Initiated)

Table 2: Perceptions of what EAP Provides (Perceptions Survey, Spring 2010)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perceptions Survey Spring 2010: “EAP Provides...”</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Don’t Know</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Programs for all UC Students</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>99%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good Services for Students</td>
<td>82%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>99%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fair Prices</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>98%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Good Opportunity to Travel</td>
<td>95%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>99%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Figure 7: Comparison of Programs that Offer Time Studying at Multiple Locations vs. One Location (Focus Group Exercise 1)

![Comparison of Programs](image)

Ultimately, the position of cultural acquisition as a goal for study abroad encompasses all stages of the participant experience. As is evident from our program participant evaluations, which are completed near the end of a participant’s time abroad, to “live in and experience a foreign country and culture” is a primary goal for 88% of participants (Cf., Table 3, below). That said, a close review of the differences between our subjects and their many uses or expectations of cultural acquisition reveals that UC students perceive “Local Faculty” or instructors to be a resource of cultural acquisition and its advantages. Paradoxically, our subjects do not make this position explicit in conversation. But in the focus group exercise, subjects expressed a profound interest in local professors; by a ration of nearly 3 to 1 the younger students anticipate that local faculty can help immerse them in the local culture (Cf., Figure 8, below). What is more, students who prefer to enroll in courses with local students—
which is mostly the case among students who had initiated an application to UCEAP – consider their peers as a resource of cultural acquisition. But as is nearly always the case, students want it all – they want the diversity of locals and UC students whom they can network with, learn from, gain support from, even befriend and stay in touch with after the program (Cf., Figure 9, below).

Table 3: Participant Goals for Study Abroad (Program Evaluations AY 2008/09-2010/11)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 3: Participant Goals for Study Abroad (Program Evaluations AY 2008/09-2010/11)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Program Partipant Goals for Study Abroad: Program Evaluation Data Academic Years 2008-09 through 2010-11.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Primary Goal</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Row N %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Make progress in my major(s).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Make progress in my minor(s).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fulfill General Education or breadth requirements.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fulfill campus language requirements.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obtain elective credit towards graduation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obtain academic experiences or coursework I could not obtain at UC.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obtain language and/or culture skills.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Live in and experience a foreign country and culture.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expand or improve my career options.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: UCEAP, Research.

Figure 8: Comparison of Courses Abroad Taught by UC Faculty vs. Local Faculty (Focus Group Exercise 1)

“ar courses to be taught by local professors. U.S. faculty is more comfortable but I want to be immersed in culture.” (UCSD, No Application Initiated)
“Would like to be in a class with locals to hear their points of view.” (UCSB, No Application Initiated)

“The more diverse, the more beneficial. Not only meeting different people from the country but also where you live. You can travel and be with friends you met when you return.” (UCD, No Application Initiated)

“Establish connections. Encourages you to go back. Networking increases your opportunity to work there after college.” (UCSD, Initiated)

Figure 9: Comparison of Classes with UC or US Peers vs. Locals (Focus Group Exercise 1)

Have Classes Mostly With UC Or US Peers / Join Locals In Their Classrooms

Essentials of Study Abroad: Professional Network & Value Added To Future

As with the acquisition of culture, students who study abroad look to their time abroad as a means to distinguish themselves and to add value to their university academic degree(s). For some this is expressed by an interest to pursue internships or a service learning experience while abroad. As Figure 10 demonstrates (Cf., below, pg. 16), the more advanced they are in their university career – or the closer they are to graduation – the more interested focus group subjects are in these styles of instruction or learning environments. Regardless of where students are in their academic career the majority of our subjects desire the opportunity to learn from these forms of instruction, and again career enhancement was a primary goal for 44% of program evaluation respondents (Cf., Figure 11, below).

In large part, this instruction or learning experience interest is directed by their aspirations for future employment. Many subjects express the opinion that study abroad will
separate them from other students with their resume – that study abroad was not an opportunity everyone had, that internships completed abroad would confer upon them the status of having “real world” experiences that employers want, and that they could expand their networking to an international scale.

In regards to the service learning experiences, students want to take the skills they already possess and apply them to world development or social assistance programs. By combining doing good for others with academic credit, study abroad can meet the demand students have for personal life experiences abroad, or what is again something that adds value to their academic record. What is more, it aligns with their interests to meet others and to gain cultural competencies of the sorts detailed in depth above.

One error in the design of our study was to confound Service Learning and Internships in the exercise (with the results evident in Figure 11, below). It needs to be made explicit that for the majority of students, the conversation was driven by internships. Between service learning & internship environments, for most students career focused internships would bring the most value.

“Not the academics, it’s about what you’re seeing and the people you’re meeting. Totally doable because you’re still in this system and you are there with a purpose. The internship is an opportunity to have hands on experience while being immersed with wherever you are.” (UCD, No Application Initiated)

“It would be cool to help specific efforts or causes abroad. You have skills, and you can call that an internship rather than a volunteer experience. It would be good to do something similar to non-profit work abroad.” (UCD, Initiated)
Figure 10: Comparison of Internships or Service Learning vs. Traditional Academic Coursework (Focus Group Exercise 1)

Figure 11: Participant Career Goals for Study Abroad (Program Evaluations AY 2008/09-2010/11)
“I feel like study abroad should offer a different kind of learning that is a little less traditional; maybe project-based learning. Internships would be awesome. Not only am I going across the world; but I’m doing an internship there, too. That would really stand out on a resume.” (UCSB, Initiated)

"Networking with other people in our field in a different country is beneficial for the future." (UCD, No Application Initiated)

"Good real world experience abroad, good for your resume. Whatever employer you're showing your resume to." (UCD, Initiated)

"I'm looking for first-hand experience in my major. Study abroad experience will be helpful to get an internship or job in the future." (UCSB, No Application Initiated)

"Experience on your resume, not everyone has an opportunity to go abroad so it's a unique opportunity; an edge in the job search... Skills acquired from being abroad that other people don't have." (UCSD, No Application Initiated)

**Essentials of Study Abroad: Personal Balance to Study Abroad**

In short, students want a balance between academics and time to explore society & culture abroad. Study abroad is a cultural enrichment experience that is more than travel. They recognize that this is a personal agenda, by and large they are not expressing the opinion that their time abroad will return a benefit to their home society (campus or California, etc). This does not need to be read as inconsistent with what was stated above about our subjects and their desire to “do good” in a local or foreign society while abroad.

"I would want to go to a place that allows me to have balance of time between school, traveling and exploring." (UCSB, No Application Initiated)

"Having a good balance between studying (doing your work and learning) and having free time to explore and meet people." (UCD, No Application Initiated)

"Study abroad is really a personal experience for me. Yeah, I have to think about classes but I would be going because 'I want to go'." (UCLA, Initiated).
Making Choices about Study Abroad: Program Identity

As UCEAP intends to constructively participate and contribute to the international education of all UC students, it is important to understand what UC students already know of or hold as beliefs about UCEAP. To uncover our subjects’ knowledge of UCEAP, we asked them, “When you hear the words UCEAP, what comes to mind?” In short, their knowledge is not always what we might want to think of ourselves or deem “accurate,” rarely uniform, and even inconsistent within a campus or subject group.

Across the UC system there are a number of programs that provide opportunities for students, each with its own descriptions of study abroad and acronyms, fees, etc. At some campuses (UCSD, UCD, & UCLA), students, even those who went so far as to initiate an application with UCEAP, are confused by these acronyms and choices between the opportunities their campuses provide. For a large number of reasons, the challenge for UCEAP is to distinguish itself and its identity for students who are making choices between providers, especially as more and more the campuses develop study abroad programs to accommodate emerging student interests.

“It can get confusing with all of the different acronyms -- UCEAP, EAP, Summer abroad is a different thing? Is it or is it not?” (UCD, Initiated)
“There was a fair at the beginning of the year. You get booklets for IEO and EAP. What’s the difference? It’s really confusing.” (UCLA, Initiated)

“I know the three basic programs, Global Seminars, EAP, OAP; hazy on the details…” (UCSD, Initiated)

For some students, the choice of a study abroad provider extends beyond UC constructs. These students found UCEAP’s semester length program too demanding of their time. Others believed that they could not meet participation pre-requisites or requirements for UCEAP: “EAP has a 3.0 GPA requirement” (UCSD, No Application Initiated). As is also evident from our Perceptions Surveys (of UCEAP applicants), UC students are independently researching their options before they initiate applications. Basically, UCEAP applicants are as likely to consider a non-UC option as they were another UC option for any number of reasons (Cf., Table 4, below).

Table 4: Student Consideration for Non-UCEAP Study Abroad Program Providers (Perceptions Survey, 2010)

| Which of the following statements best describes how much you considered the following study abroad program providers: | Independently researched other provider opportunities | Talked with or met with other program provider advisors/recruiters or past participants/alumni | Initiated an application(s) with other providers | Completed an application with other providers | I didn't investigate such programs | TOTAL |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Other UC Programs (e.g., UCLA Summer Travel, UCD & UCSD Faculty Led “Quarter” Programs, etc.) | 25% | 12% | 2% | 3% | 58% | 100% |
| Non-UC Programs (e.g., Semester at Sea, CIEE, Butler University...) | 26% | 9% | 2% | 3% | 60% | 100% |


“EAP didn’t fit into my schedule. I can’t do semester programs so I have to go outside EAP. If I could have, I would have studied abroad through EAP.” (UCSB, Initiated)

“I can’t make myself suitable for EAP, language proficiency is an issue.” (UCLA, No Application Initiated).

Making Choices about Study Abroad: Reputation

All of this leads to the question of the value of reputation in higher education and in particular as it relates to our sector or study abroad. For many students, UCEAP sounds “prestigious” because it is associated with the UC. This suggests that “prestige” is a specific latent character or feature to the UC’s brand (or at least is such among UC students).

In one instance, the focus group moderator probed the subjects as to the consequence or potential of UCEAP partnering with another entity, such as the California State University, and how this might impact their decisions to participate. The responses were interesting. Some
stated that it didn’t matter. But another subject put forth: “As long as UC name is on there, you’re good to go. Important that it is a recognized UC program.” (UCSB, No Application Initiated). This last statement cut short or concluded the discussion, leaving the issue as ambiguous as when it started.

Apparently larger associations of the UC identity or brand can be assimilated by UCEAP. Thus, it remains possible to make qualitative differentiations in the market or to preserve study abroad from becoming a mere commodity. That being said, the qualities UCEAP gains as a systemwide program and through its association with the greater UC will not trump the personal needs for study abroad among our UC students. What this means for UCEAP (and other UC constructs or study abroad) is that students will continue to pursue their self-interests through other providers if we do not have, or fail to demonstrate that we have, what they need.

Making Choices about Study Abroad: Market Position

In the consideration of UCEAP’s position in the market, some specifics emerged from the focus groups. Some students believed that we had good prices. Others had heard that there was a better chance their units earned abroad would “transfer”, or contribute to their UC degree, than if they studied with another provider. To prove that we are in a human or inconsistent market, it is no surprise to find that another significant cadre of students was of the opinion that our prices are “more expensive because everything is set up” (UCSD, No Application Initiated). And another student hinted to UCEAP’s broader market challenges by stating: “I know people that went through different programs because they weren't satisfied with the EAP program,” (UCSB, Initiated Application).

For the most part, this description of our market position is confirmed by the results of our Perceptions Survey (conducted with UCEAP applicants). Among that survey’s respondents, the vast majority of whom are about to depart for programs abroad, there is substantial ambiguity about our program prices --58% of respondents said either “No” or “Don’t Know” --, and a substantial degree of doubt cast upon the statement that, “EAP Provides Programs for all UC Students” (31% saying “No” or “Don’t Know”) or what is one of our core values: “Study Abroad for All.” (Cf., Table 5, below)

Table 5: Expectations for What EAP Provides (Perceptions Survey, 2010)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perceptions Survey Spring 2010: “EAP Provides…”</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Don’t Know</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Programs for all UC Students</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>99%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good Services for Students</td>
<td>82%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>99%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fair Prices</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>98%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Good Opportunity to Travel</td>
<td>95%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>99%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As our focus group subjects or students are somewhat confused about the definition of UCEAP and other UC study abroad providers, and of UCEAP’s position in the market, it is not surprising that the value of the UC brand is somewhat soft in international education or study abroad. What all this makes clear is that students are conducting their own research and using their networks and resources to gather information about study abroad, and to resolve questions about the value of UCEAP for them, and/or that other entities are effectively marketing their programs to UC students.

**Making Choices about Study Abroad: Influencers**

Students value the opinions of their friends, and especially of those who have studied abroad before them. In the exercise at the conclusion of the second section, we asked students to indicate the expected value they held for an array of information resources. After “Study Abroad Fairs” and “Websites,” “Friends” ranked third with 65% of respondents expecting their friends to provide “A Lot” or “Quite a Bit” of information about study abroad. For students who had never initiated an application the value of friends climbed to 73% (Cf., Figure 13, below).

Word of mouth is consequently a powerful advocate for or opponent of UCEAP, and in some respects students expect their friends to contribute information very nearly equal to that of our staff and administrators (Cf., Figure 13, below). And again, this is surprisingly close to the findings of our Perceptions Survey (of UCEAP applicants) where students see their friends & family network as largely responsible for their initial interest in study abroad before staff and administrators have contributed to or built upon those interests in study abroad or UCEAP.

At this time, the evidence suggests the need of an active and organized cadre of program returnees who can directly and personally testify to the value of study abroad with students, parents, and other influencers in the student’s personal network. But this comes with some risk. Students who are institutionally organized are not necessarily given confidence and trust by our subjects or other UC students.
"From friends or family that have already studied abroad, who can “sell” it to you... Learning about a real experience from someone who went abroad is the best." (UCD, No Application Initiated)

"I have a friend who studied with EAP in Italy... It changed her entire perspective on things. For all my friends who participated in EAP programs, they all really liked it." (UCLA, No Application Initiated)

“I don’t know if I would trust returnees... I would rather meet students and talk about their experience rather than seeing them do a presentation on a stage.... I wouldn’t trust returnees at an organized meeting or fair either because obviously that persona enjoyed it so they’re talking from that perspective. I would trust a friend or a friend’s friend who would tell me what really happened abroad.” (UCLA Student, Initiated”)

The validity of any research that probes among parents for the level of influence or shape of their student’s network of influences can be questioned. But by asking this question of parents we still gain some indication of what is at work in some student’s networks. One result of our recent Parent Survey was evidence that a student’s network of personal influences extends beyond their home UC campus. The fact that parents see themselves only a little less
influential than the student’s peers when deciding to participate is not wrong. Students surprisingly agreed with this finding in our Perceptions Surveys.

Where parents largely differ from students is in their gross under-estimation of the influence and power campus staff members have to influence participation decisions among applicants. Where parents rank UC Staff only above “Don’t know / Wouldn’t really know influences” students express that it is our UC staff members who have the most influence with them (Cf., Figures 14 & 15, below). Again, we should note the relatively weaker confidence students give their student “Peer Advisors,” or students who have been institutionally organized by the campuses study abroad offices (Cf., Figure 15, below).

*Figure 14: Perceived Influencers of student/child’s decision to participate in a UCEAP program (Parents Survey, 2010-11)*
Learning about Study Abroad: Social Media

Looking at the above charts on resources for learning about study abroad and student perceptions about influencers in their decision to participate, it is easy to dismiss the value of Facebook or more recent social media tools for communicating with UC students. This would be, in the estimation of our subjects, the wrong direction to take. In short, students understand these resources and communication tools to be useful for accomplishing different things and the difference found between the anticipated utility of a website and Facebook only underscores the fact that the framing of this exercise utterly fails to elicit the purpose or uses of social media in the minds of our subjects and students.

Not to define things too narrowly, but Facebook is for active and timely exchanges with peers, or very recent past participants. In other words, learning about study abroad still happens in traditional spaces (at study abroad fairs, between friends & family, on websites, in print publications, or otherwise by staff or administrators & faculty), but sharing and socializing and connecting to others like yourself – by major, by country, by program, by term, by department, by-any-way-you-can-define-yourself-&-study abroad -- is what Facebook is for. This also comes with a warning, Facebook might get redundant, as students won’t always read what has previously been posted, and they won’t always appreciate an older or non-student audience posting or commenting on Facebook; some discussions are, rightly or wrongly, exclusively prescribed by peers and for peers.
"Facebook is good for outreach and social networking..." (UCSB, Initiated)

“Facebook is social, not somewhere to go for information” (UCSD, No Application Initiated).

“I think it is perfect, when someone wrote ‘who else is going?’ you can just start communicating off of that.” (UCSB, No Application Initiated).

“If you wanted a discussion facilitated by UCEAP staff, you would go to the website.” (UCSB, Initiated)

“Student-peer input is better” (Other people nodding their heads in unison). (UCSB, Initiated)

“Some parents use Facebook. But I’m not friends with them. I could send them the link in the e-mail.” (UCD, No Application Initiated)

Facebook’s flexibility is not only a content feature. For our subjects Facebook is a contextually flexible tool. If they are not comfortable posting to Facebook (e.g., maybe exposing unfamiliarity with a popular subject?), many will try to move the conversation to a less visible environment. Then again, our subjects find that successful Facebook pages have a higher pace of messages which means the content is ephemeral. The ephemeral content coupled with the lower intimacy of Facebook walls reduces the social risks of public expression.

“I would ask a question and get an answer in a high visibility environment.” (UCLA, No Application Initiated).

“You can message people privately on Facebook; good way to initiate the conversation.” (UCSD, Initiated).

“I would post a question. It’s just Facebook. I feel like it is a lot more comfortable than sending an e-mail.” (UCSB, Initiated).

The most significant reasons why our subjects would “Like” our institutional Facebook page is for non-institutional content. Our subjects largely anticipate the utility in Facebook as a means of gaining insider knowledge about locations abroad, for tips about travel while abroad, for clues to what is happening where they are going, or for connecting with and sharing with others as they prepare to leave (possibly together) for destinations abroad.

With that said, our subjects also anticipate that the institution will post timely relevant information to the Facebook community. They expect to find posts regarding upcoming deadlines, campus events relating to study abroad or UCEAP, and contact information for support. What is more, some students see Facebook as a means to have specific questions answered by professionals and expect to verify information they read on Facebook. In short,
the administrators or professionals can inform through the Facebook Wall, they can contribute when users are stymied or have a question, but they should carefully balance their presence against the subject of discussion and the amount of discussion they direct.

“I don’t consider Facebook as a valid place for information. I would go to the website or someone to confirm what is said on Facebook.” (UCD, Initiated).

“Totally fine if an admin(istrator) responds.” (UCSB, Initiated).

Learning about Study Abroad: UCEAP’s Website

As UCEAP was near the end of a website redesign project, it was essential to review with students the uses of the website and the new design of the website. In specific, the website is judged by our subjects to be a critical and official resource for learning about study abroad (Cf., Figure 16, below), or to use their word for it, “technical things” that we might otherwise label as “program specifics”. When the website is assessed by applicants in the Perceptions Survey, and in particular by those who claim to have first learned of UCEAP through their own interests, the website is much more likely to be recalled as an outreach item of UCEAP (Cf., Table 6, below) and given higher rating for influence in decisions to apply.

Figure 16: Amount Students Except to Learn about Study Abroad: Facebook vs. Website (Focus Group Exercise 2)
Table 6: Multiple Response Cross table for Outreach Items Recalled & How Students First Learned of EAP (Perceptions Survey, 2010)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Which of the following EAP outreach items do you recall? (Check all that apply)</th>
<th>Which of the following statements best describes how you first came to know about the EAP program?</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Column N %</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Column N %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>EAP Website</td>
<td>Campus outreach efforts (advertisements, advisor presentations, website, email...) first introduced me to EAP</td>
<td>222</td>
<td>64.0%</td>
<td>457</td>
<td>76.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EAP Country-Specific brochures</td>
<td>My own efforts (personal interests, experiences, personal associations, research...) first introduced me to EAP</td>
<td>271</td>
<td>76.1%</td>
<td>391</td>
<td>63.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Networks (e.g. Facebook)</td>
<td></td>
<td>54</td>
<td>15.6%</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>16.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E-Mail Messages</td>
<td></td>
<td>149</td>
<td>42.9%</td>
<td>201</td>
<td>32.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I don’t remember any of the above items</td>
<td></td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5.2%</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>7.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>347</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>614</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

“The website and faculty-staff would be the first people I would go to. I think they would have the most accurate information.” (UCD, Initiated)

“I would go to the EAP website. It’s the number one best resource.” (UCSB, Initiated)

“For technical things like prices I would go to the website; friends for feedback on experiences.” (UCSD, No Application Initiated)

“I trust websites more than Facebook pages. A lot of stuff on Facebook is dressed up to make it look entertaining and easy to absorb, whereas the website would be more extensive, helpful, and legitimate.” (UCSB, No Application Initiated)

In the eyes and minds of our subjects, the display of our website homepage (Cf., Appendix C, below) elicited overwhelmingly positive responses, regardless of cohort or focus group. What they really liked was a striking strong image on the homepage, and that this page was accompanied by a minimal use of text. As one student put it when viewing the static image of the Great Wall of China, “Kind of want to go to China now.” (UCLA, No Application Initiated). With that said, the students want to see an array of places, geographically.

“Really well organized, really straight forward.” (UCD, No Application Initiated)

“Very nice, looks very professional.” (UCLA, Initiated)
“Good that the picture takes up a lot of the front. UC Davis website is all words and no pictures; I don’t even want to look at it anymore.” (UCD, No Application Initiated).

How students would navigate this webpage is an open question. Showing students a page and asking them what they would do, without the ability to do it, is far from ideal. Of course, our new website will allow us to measure the frequency with which pages are viewed, for how long, and how users migrate between the pages, etc. All that aside, the subjects’ comments demonstrate that a few of the tabs or links are potentially confusing and this seems to be the case with the tabs “UCEAP Advantage,” “Our Stories,” and “Getting Started”.

Regarding the tab entitled “UCEAP Advantage,” one student thought that this might be an honor’s program (UCSB, No Application Initiated), and another gained agreement from the majority of their group when they said, “I like the order on the site but I don’t know what ‘UCEAP Advantage’ means.” (UCD, No Application Initiated). For several others, there was some sense that this page would demonstrate what makes UCEAP unique and outline the benefits of UCEAP in “comparison to other programs like OAP.” (UCSD, No Application Initiated). As another student put it: “My mom would click on UCEAP Advantage or I would share it with her because I already have a good idea of what the advantages are” (UCSB, No Application Initiated).

For many subjects, “Our Stories” and “Getting Started” are where they think they would start. The use of “Our Stories” is not in doubt, it is a debate among students as to whether they would first look to “Our Programs” before consulting “Our Stories.” With Getting Started, subjects expected this to link to the application – which was somewhat redundant: “I think they should be one link instead of two” (UCSB, No Application Initiated).

But this crude display of the website as a static image was perhaps most beneficial in that it allowed, and maybe even encouraged, students to consistently identify what was missing on the homepage for them: pricing or financial aid information.

“First thing – I would want a button for financial aid. Or a ‘How can you afford studying abroad.’” (UCD, No Application Initiated).

“Add a ‘Prices’ section with funding study abroad and scholarships... Even though students would click it and be scared away.” (This comment gained laughter from the other subjects, UCD, Initiated).

Other features that the subjects thought they’d like to see on the landing page included a prominent connection to Facebook or Twitter, a resource for “live internet chat” or maybe a discussion forum, an FAQ page (frequently asked questions), and contact information. What separated students at this point was their level of familiarity with UCEAP. Subjects who had previously initiated an application with UCEAP (or again, those who were upper-class level students) spoke from a position of experience. They wanted a page that would allow them to track their progress through the application process, or have a checklist of what is required.
before they initiate an application. In either case, the ability to integrate our student information and application database (MyEAP) within the website is a critical upgrade for eliminating “surprises” and increasing retention of applicants or helping them become participants.

“Regarding check-in items, give us a green x if we done it and a red check () if haven’t. Easier to keep track of.” (UCD, Initiated)

“Scared of missing a single form and not being able to go. Would rather not worry so much. Have a calendar that outlines when everything is due. Let us know ‘This is already done so you don’t need to worry about that.’” (UCD, Initiated)

“Don’t want to have to start the application first. Just want to see the checklist of what you need to do.” (UCLA, Initiated)

Making Decisions about Study Abroad: Financial Obstacles

Decisions about study abroad are often academic and financial. For students, the financial considerations are intensely expressed and varied. For some it is an issue of overall cost and perceptions of cost; others have financial concerns for financial aid or scholarships. UCEAP must recognize that we compete for students’ attention and time with many other opportunities that students see as valuable and beneficial to them and that all require a financial commitment. Then, of course, there is also the personal pressure for students who support themselves while in school and the potential loss of income while abroad.

For most students there is a perception that study abroad necessarily costs more than staying on campus. This is in part informed by their most trusted resource: friends who are recent returnees. The following exchange between a couple of UCLA students (who had initiated applications but not participated) summarizes the perception of cost, trust, and resources. Speaking about a friend — any student’s most trusted resource for information— who had returned from Austria (and most likely was not a UCEAP participant) one student noted that:

“She had zero dollars left in her bank account. It’s such an expense so I feel like it would be kind of irresponsible for me to do it.”

This comment was immediately followed by another student who noted:

“I hear it depends on the country because they have different costs.”

But this opinion that location matters is then quickly dismissed by a third student who comes in with:
“Travel study and EAP estimated costs on the website are not correct. Can’t depend on the financial estimate they give you on a website. I’ve heard it from other students and I’ve experienced it myself.” (All quotes above UCLA, Initiated)

There was nothing else said on the matter. The authority of a peer’s direct insight that aligns to preconceptions of study abroad being expensive trumps institutional resources, as it most commonly will. And even the rare individual, who has some clues as to the fact that costs vary by location and that maybe study abroad could be more affordable in some places, is not given credit for their insight as they are speaking in hypotheticals and from an institutional point of reference.

One indicator of the “price point” for students comes from the exercise in which we asked subjects how much money they wanted to spend for study abroad. Of course our subjects would ideally rather spend a lot less than what they spend to stay at home on the UC. But within both initiated UCEAP application and non-initiated application focus group cohorts there exists a sizeable cadre who are willing to remain “neutral” between paying more and paying less than the cost of studying at a UC campus (Cf., Figure 17, below).

Looking too carefully at this data to inform an “ideal program” might not always prove too helpful as the same subjects who want to study at multiple locations also want it to cost less than campus. But again, our exercise was eliciting independent ideals rather than a breakdown of what they think is possible. The “neutral” we take to be students for whom anchoring to the cost of a UC campus is acceptable or serves students as a benchmark and position in the market.

Figure 17: Comparison of Cost Between UCEAP & UC Campus (Focus Group Exercise 1)
The need for financial aid is commonly expressed by subjects, and in instances it is recognized as an essential financial contribution for their participation. Without it, they are certain that they would not be able to participate. “If I don’t get financial aid, I wouldn’t be able to participate in this opportunity at all.” (UCLA, No Application Initiated).

But our subjects are also keenly aware of the fact that not all financial aid is the same. Students want to avoid taking loans. As the UC financial aid program is currently configured, student financial aid packages that include scholarships do not commonly reduce loans. “It seems like the majority of funding ends up being loans and stuff. Trying to avoid that.” (UCD, Initiated Application) For the “loan adverse” subject or student, an increased amount awarded to them as a scholarships might not be enough to retain them, for their debt or loan amount will necessarily – and as the financial aid policy is commonly and currently applied -- remain the same.

There is also a subset of subjects for whom the costs of study abroad represent a lost opportunity to earn income. Some students even profess to support themselves while in school. For such students, finances is probably always a critical obstacle to participation. So providing them with meaningful financial aid, student budgets at or below cost on campus, and programs that meet their academic interests as students who do not want to be delayed to degree by study abroad, are all necessities. Even if delayed for merely a quarter or a semester, the financial consequences are tremendous for this, and really for every, audience of subjects or students.

In our Academic Integration survey of 2009, a survey conducted with recently returned program participants, 23% were of the opinion that their time abroad would delay their time to degree. Even if a census of students demonstrated that UCEAP program participants graduate sooner than their peers, we have to remember that this “institutional evidence” is not likely to trump the word of mouth among their peers. When nearly 1 in 4 returnees are telling other students that study abroad delayed their time to degree we have a tremendously difficult and intellectually robust narrative to counter in the market.

“Expensive. I looked at cost and gasped when I saw the numbers ‘How am I going to do this?’” (UCSD, Initiated)

“Money. A lot of college students want to study abroad but never try to find out about it because it’s so expensive.” (UCD, No Application Initiated)

“When I looked at the cost, I had trouble justifying study abroad as anything more than a vacation. This would be fun, but is studying abroad a responsible thing to do with my money and time?” (UCSB, Initiated)
“Country is first priority because academics you can do here. But financial is also a big problem. If I don’t get financial aid, I wouldn’t be able to participate in this opportunity at all.” (UCLA, No Application Initiated)

“It’s mainly money and classes. You might need to stay an extra quarter if your classes don’t transfer. It’s kind of a gamble.” (UCLA, Initiated)

“If money is spent on program, nothing left to spend on personal interests. There are so many things you want to do there, but they all cost money.” (UCSD, Initiated)

“I support myself, so my biggest worry would be finances. I know it costs about the same (that’s how it works somehow) but the cost of living would be different.” (UCSB, Initiated)

Making Decisions about Study Abroad: Personal Obstacles

On a personal level, students confront the separation from home. Some of our subjects were hesitant to speak of this obstacle in the first person, and they would adopt the first person plural or another voice so as to lower the verbal intimacy and immediacy of their admissions. But their opinions of the matter were common to nearly all campuses and focus groups.

For some focus group subjects, the matter is expressed as a fear of isolation, for others it is home-sickness or “reverse culture shock.” There are also others that noted their regard for personal safety and the logistics involved if they needed to respond to an emergency at home. For one student -- and given that this is a sensitive topic personally, it is hard to say that they are representative of many students -- the anxiety of cultural adjustment combined with the need to commit to a full year proved too much to surmount and led to their withdrawal from UCEAP. Lastly, some are aware that time abroad will include the cost of missing opportunities and memories of college at home; some of which can be powerful reasons for why they elected to attend a campus in the first place.

“I guess we could be homesick. But we’re kind of at an age where we know if we can handle it or not.” (UCLA, No Application Initiated)

“A lot of my friends are honestly just reluctant to leave home. Want to stay here because everything’s familiar” (UCSB, Initiated)

“... but something my peers and I don’t know (is) what it’s actually going to be like? How do I know that I’m not going to be in a foreign country by myself, not knowing anyone? We have a community here... Even though it is a fun thing to do and it’s rewarding to a lot of people, there are a lot of risks and things people are uneasy about because they don’t know.” (UCSB, Initiated)
“If you get sick, something tragic happens to you or your family, hard to get back and figure out what’s going to happen.” *(UCLA, Initiated)*

“Fear of not liking it abroad, still in the back of my mind. Not getting along with people. What if (it is) not the right program for you?” *(UCSD, No Application Initiated)*

“That’s why I decided not to go to Cairo. I wanted to believe that I was the kind of person who could leave home. But they only had a year-long program and I didn’t want to get stuck in a foreign culture that I didn’t want to end up hating... I was afraid of culture shock and afraid of the year-long time-frame.” *(UCSB, Initiated)*

“You will be missing out on your friends in Westwood, you will have separate memories and it won’t be the same.” *(UCLA, Initiated)*

Other obstacles to study abroad are probably nothing new, but worth reporting and keeping in mind. There is a concern for the logistics of transportation, passports and visas, housing – which cuts both ways as students are concerned about their housing abroad and what happens to their housing situation at home while they are away. Subjects have global concerns about the application which includes some specifics such as deadlines and other requirements. In fact, letters of recommendation were particularly of concern to the focus group subjects of lower academic class standing, or those who have not previously initiated an application, since they haven’t had time yet to build relationships with faculty. There are concerns for their GPA and language pre-requisites or qualifying to apply and then participate.

And last but not least, our subjects carry with them a sense of urgency or even anxiety resulting from the fact that they have many things to do. For some, these obstacles add up to construct a greater whole and study abroad becomes simply something to give up. There is a very strong demand for their time where study abroad is concerned. Given the length of time or lead time involved with the UCEAP application, not only do applicants have to plan ahead academically, but they have to take care with their current academic arena and plan for the next term and then for study abroad as well.

For all these reasons and others we no doubt failed to capture, students are asking us either directly or indirectly to help them through the process or to make the process easier.

“Does the price advertised include airfare? Logistics of going abroad: What is transportation like? Getting from the airport to the school once you arrive? Getting around?” *(UCLA, Initiated)*

“May run into additional challenges if you have an apartment you have to sublease, etc.” *(UCD, Initiated)*
“Concerned about obtaining letter of recommendation because busy already, it’s the biggest hurdles for me right now. It’s one of the main reasons I haven’t applied."

“OAP friend needed a recommendation letter, student doesn’t feel like he’s had enough interaction with professor to warrant a recommendation letter.” (Exchange between two students; UCSD, No Application Initiated)

“It’s hard to get to the language classes at UC to participate in study abroad programs that require a few years of language study. You have to do it right away or you won’t meet the language requirement. Those classes are impacted.” (UCD, No Application Initiated)

“Hardest part is turning in the application on time. If you can do that it’s extremely easy to go abroad; other than handling finances and legal work of visas.” (UCSB, Initiated).

“I think there are people who get discouraged by all the problems we just mentioned. So they say, ‘Forget it, I’ll just travel when I’m done with school.’ Having to do homework when you’re abroad and wanting to travel is a bummer.” (UCSB, No Application Initiated).

“I’m going on a summer travel study in four weeks, and a lot of things still aren’t clear. Going through the process and trying to get in touch with the financial aid office... Trying to take care of everything before you go. The process before it (is) really hectic. I’m trying to take care of school here while also planning for next quarter.” (UCLA, Initiated)

“Is there anything that could be done to make the process easier?” (UCLA, Initiated)

RECOMMENDATIONS:

At this point it is common for a focus group report to conclude with specific recommendations. Rather than making explicit statements, we feel it is best that UCEAP staff members and other UCEAP stakeholders provide comments, contributions of their own, and discussions about how this effort can inform the larger vision and mission of UCEAP through the strategic plan and its initiatives. What is more, the “Findings Brief” (Cf., pg. 2f) above gives a succinct summary to the study without controversy. Throughout the report above, there are some recommendations to be found, there are some admitted needs for deeper study or clarification, and there are some demonstrated advantages and problems for UCEAP to seize upon, explore, and resolve. These certainly are a source for comment, contribution, and discussions that will no doubt encourage UCEAP to remain mindful of all students and their changing needs for an excellent academic study abroad program administered by the best business practices.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:

The UCEAP Research unit would like to explicitly acknowledge and thank the many people across the UC organization that supported, contributed to, and otherwise made this effort possible and ultimately successful. In particular, we would like to thank those who helped us recruit focus group subjects, who made available to us a place to conduct the research on their campus, who served as note-takers, who reviewed the focus group plan and script, and who otherwise assisted in logistical and technical support. We also need to highlight the large sacrifices made by note takers and moderators from UCEAP, who in most instances had to travel a fair distance and otherwise were delayed in advancing in their own professional duties.

UC Davis Focus Group
Blake Cooper, recruiter and note taker
Zachary Frieders, recruiter and note taker

UC San Diego Focus Group
Jinous Kasravi, recruiter and note taker
Kelly O'Sullivan, recruiter and note taker

UC Los Angeles Focus Group
Danilo Bonilla, recruiter and note taker
Sergio Broderick-Villa, recruiter and note taker
Vito Grillo, recruiter and note taker

UC Santa Barbara Focus Group
Emily Tom-Atzberger, recruiter and note taker
Sue Berg-Arnold, recruiter and note taker
Kate Musselman, note taker

UCEAP
Leeanne Figueroa, logistical support
Jean-Xavier Guinard, project support & oversight
David Kujan, logistical support
Stacey Lydon, focus group moderator
Irene Phetteplace, data entry
Kristin Maryott, focus group moderator
Mark McCann, information technology support
Karen Mead, project script review & editing
May Pothongsunun, note taker
Kelsey South, note taker
Appendix A: Focus Group Script for Subjects Who Have Never Initiated an Application.

Script for Focus Group Participants that have never initiated an application with UCEAP.

Introduction.
For each panel member seated around the table. Have written on a poster or large tablet:

"We’d like to start by having you introduce yourself to the group. Give us your first name, class level, major, and let us know if you are considering study abroad while in college."

Goal is to establish a sense of group identity or community. Not necessarily a response for analysis.

I. Study abroad for all, including an understanding of student access (or obstacles)
A) Introductory Question(s): (Top of the funnel Questions; 10 minutes.)
1. "What do you know about Study Abroad programs on your campus?"

B) Core Questions: (15 minutes) -- Connecting topic to them (individual and group goal)
1. "What are the benefits of Study Abroad?"
2. "What are the disadvantages of Study Abroad?"
3. "At most, about 30% of students study abroad. What prevents most students from studying abroad?" (Here we are expecting to hear some of the usual or common obstacles: finances, units, housing, work,... but you should be prepared to probe the panel for more specifics or to keep them on track as some of these can be personal (difficult to admit) or lead to other subjects that are tangential to our research goals.)

C) Specific Exercise/Response or Narrow Questions: (15 minutes)
1. "When you hear the words, 'University of California Education Abroad Program,' what comes to mind?"
2. Distribute the following Exercise table and ask participants to complete and return to you, the Moderator & Assistant.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Column A</th>
<th>Column B</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Allow Online Self-Paced Classes</td>
<td>Emphasize In Classroom Exchange</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Include Internships Or Service Learning Experiences</td>
<td>Focus on Traditional Academic Coursework</td>
</tr>
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<td>Cost Less Than Studying at UC Campus</td>
<td>Cost More than Studying At UC Campus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide Ample Opportunity for Self Interests</td>
<td>Should Have Little Time For Self Interests</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have Classes Mostly With UC Or US Peers</td>
<td>Join Locals In Their Classrooms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide Courses Not Taught at UC</td>
<td>Provide Courses Similar To UC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teach Courses In Foreign Language</td>
<td>Teach Courses In English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Require Original Academic Research</td>
<td>Emphasize Learning By Instruction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Courses Taken Abroad Would Likely NOT Apply To Transcript &amp; GPA</td>
<td>Courses Taken Abroad Would Likely Apply To Transcript &amp; GPA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have UC Campus Faculty Teaching Classes Abroad</td>
<td>Have Local Faculty Teach Courses</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The phrases in Column A and Column B express opposite meanings. Place an X on each line to indicate how closely you agree with one or the other when completing the following statement: "Ideally Study Abroad Should:

D) Summary: "Let me summarize what I heard so far (summarizing the discussion of the questions above, not including at this point the results of the exercise)..."
adequate summary?" OR "How well have I captured what was said here?" OR "Did I correctly
describe what was said?"  *Continue until the room is in agreement with your summary.*

**Five Minute Break**

II. Academic excellence, including academic integration and articulation as the moderator you
will not need to use & explain the words Integration & Articulation.

**Introduction:** "*Let's begin by following up on the exercise you completed before our summary
and break...*"

A) Open: Top of the funnel Questions. *Hopefully the last exercise above has initiated thinking
about academics* (10 minutes).

1. "Say you were considering study abroad: What are the things you look for to meet your
needs or interests?"  (*These are not likely to be entirely related to academic concerns --
social & cultural interests/opportunities...*)

B) Core Questions: (20 minutes)

1. "Among the things you look for in study abroad, which are most important to you and
why?"  (*Questions IB3, IIA1, and the first exercise should have them well prepared to
discuss program characteristics (pedagogy, environment,... You can reference earlier
discussions or the first exercise to probe & focus on matters that have potential given the
nonverbal and verbal cues of the panel, reflections of the Exercise or feedback from the
Observers.  E.g., make mention of Internships, reference the introduction and their goals
for college and study abroad...*)

2. "What are the academic risks associated with study abroad?"  (*These might very much
over-lap with the benefits & disadvantages of study abroad discussed at IB1&2, but you
can probe more deeply upon the matter of GPA, future academic & career goals,
transcripts and course records, progress to degree, course sequences in some
disciplines...*)

3. "Do you have a preference for a program that is for students only from your UC campus,
or for a program that has students from all UC campuses, and why or why not?"

C) Specific Exercise/Response (5 minutes)

1. Distribute the following Exercise table and ask participants to complete and return to
you, the Moderator & Assistant.
From the following list of information resources, circle the word or phrase that best describes how much you would expect to get information about study abroad from each one.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Information Resource</th>
<th>A Lot</th>
<th>Quite a Bit</th>
<th>Some</th>
<th>Little</th>
<th>None</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Friends</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Parents &amp;/Or Other Family Members</td>
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<tr>
<td>UC Administrators/Staff</td>
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<td>UC Faculty</td>
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<tr>
<td>Print Brochures &amp; Publications</td>
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<tr>
<td>UC Orientation(s)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Study Abroad Fairs</td>
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<td>College Recruitment Events</td>
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<tr>
<td>Student Blogs</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

D) Summary: "Let me summarize what I heard (to the questions above, not including the exercise: . . . . Is this an adequate summary?"; OR "How well have I captured what was said here?" OR "Did I correctly describe what was said?" Continue until the room is in agreement with your summary.

**Five Minute Break**

III. Best business practices, including marketing tools

A) Open: Top of the funnel Questions. (10 minutes)

1. "How would you research or expect to learn about a Study Abroad program?" *(Using the responses of the second exercise might be a source for probing. You can probe on the matters of confidence they place in different resources, if they see "a lot" or would expect to see "more of" or about study abroad in some venues or events than they do)*

B) Core Questions: (30 minutes)

*We will have web access for displaying our Facebook Pages, existing website homepage, and our new website homepage as an image using a laptop & projector.*

1. "How should Facebook pages be organized?" *(Begin with a general discussion of Facebook: by country, academic discipline, time of year, length of study?? We are interested in their intuitive expectations with Facebook -- a resource with very limited design)*

2. *Now show them our Facebook page -- begin with our corporate page.* "What would you want to look at or do or go to on this page and why? And what is missing?" *(Be prepared to return to these questions as different panel members might take different directions to and from elements within Facebook.)*

3. *Migrate to a Facebook Country page: Spain.* Again, ask them: "Now, what would you want to look at or do or go to on this page and why? And what is missing?"
4. *Now show them the design of our new website homepage.* "What are your first impressions or thoughts about this website design for UCEAP?"

5. "Do you think the links or portals suggested on this page would meet your expectations or interests and needs for a study abroad website?" *(Again, probe with "What is missing or needed?"*)

D) Summary: Let me summarize what I heard (to the questions above):...." .... Is this an adequate summary?" OR "How well have I captured what was said here?" OR "Did I correctly describe what was said?" *Continue until the room is in agreement with your summary*

Conclude: Thank the members of the panel. You can let them know that we are from UCEAP and that we will be using their responses to inform our planning, program initiatives, & outreach efforts. Encourage them to take a drink & snack on their way out.
APPENDIX B: Focus Group Script for Subjects Who Have Initiated an Application

Introduction.

For each panel member seated around the table. Have written on a poster or large tablet:

"We'd like to start by having you introduce yourself to the group. Give us your first name, class level, major, and let us know if you are considering study abroad while in college." 

Goal is to establish a sense of group identity or community. Not necessarily a response for analysis.

I. Study abroad for all, including an understanding of student access (or obstacles)
A) Introductory Question(s): (Top of the funnel Questions; 10 minutes.)
   1. What do you know about Study Abroad programs on your campus?

B) Core Questions: (15 minutes) -- Connecting topic to them (individual and group goal)
   1. "What are the benefits of Study Abroad?"
   2. "What are the disadvantages of Study Abroad?"
   3. "At most, about 30% of students study abroad. What prevents most students from studying abroad?" (Here we are expecting to hear some of the usual or common obstacles: finances, units, housing, work,... but you should be prepared to probe the panel for more specifics or to keep them on track as some of these can be personal (difficult to admit) or lead to other subjects that are tangential to our research goals.)

C) Specific Exercise/Response or Narrow Questions: (15 minutes)
   1. "When you hear the words 'University of California Education Abroad Program', what comes to mind?"
   2. Distribute the following Exercise table and ask participants to complete a and return to you, the Moderator & Assistant.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<tbody>
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<td>Allow Online Self-Paced Classes</td>
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</tr>
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<td>Emphasize One Place</td>
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The phrases in Column A and Column B express opposite meanings. Place an X on each line to indicate how closely you agree with one or the other when completing the following statement: "Ideally Study Abroad Should:

D) Summary: "Let me summarize what I heard so far (summarizing the discussion of the questions above, not including at this point the results of the exercise): . . . . Is this an adequate
summary?" OR "How well have I captured what was said here?" OR "Did I correctly describe what was said?" Continue until the room is in agreement with your summary.

**Five Minute Break**

**II. Academic excellence, including academic integration and articulation** as the moderator you will not use & explain the words Integration & Articulation.

*Introduction*: "Let’s begin by following up on the exercise you completed before our summary and break..."

**A) Open: Top of the funnel Questions.** Hopefully the last exercise above has initiated thinking about academics (10 minutes).

1. "When considering study abroad: What are the things you look for to meet your needs or interests?" (These are not likely to be entirely related to academic concerns -- social & cultural interests/opportunities...)

**B) Core Questions: (20 minutes)**

1. "Among the things you look for in study abroad, which are or were most important to you and why?" (Questions IB3, IIA1, and the first exercise should have them well prepared to discuss program characteristics (pedagogy, environment,... You can reference earlier discussions or the first exercise to probe & focus on matters that have potential given the nonverbal and verbal cues of the panel, reflections of the Exercise or feedback from the Observers. E.g., make mention of Internships, reference the introduction and their goals for college and study abroad...)

2. "In your opinion, what are the academic risks associated with study abroad?" (These might very much over-lap with the benefits & disadvantages of study abroad discussed at IB1&2, but you can probe more deeply upon the matter of GPA, future academic & career goals, transcripts and course records, progress to degree, course sequences in some disciplines...).

3. "Do you have a preference for a program that is for students only from your UC campus, or for a program that has students from all UC campuses, and why or why not?"

**C) Specific Exercise/Response (5 minutes)**

1. Distribute the following Exercise table and ask participants to complete and return to you, the Moderator & Assistant.
### From the following list of information resources, circle the word or phrase that best describes how much you would expect to get information about study abroad from each one.

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**D) Summary:** "Let me summarize what I heard (to the questions above, again not the exercise just collected): ".... Is this an adequate summary?"; OR "How well have I captured what was said here?" OR "Did I correctly describe what was said?" *Continue until the room is in agreement with your summary*

### Five Minute Break

### III. Best business practices, including marketing tools

#### A) Open: Top of the funnel Questions. (10 minutes)

1. "How do you research and expect to learn about a Study Abroad program?" *(Using the responses of the second exercise might be a source for probing. You can probe on the matters of confidence they place in different resources, if they see "a lot" or would expect to see "more of" or about study abroad in some venues or events than they do)*

#### B) Core Questions: (30 minutes)

*We will have web access for displaying our Facebook Pages, existing website homepage, and our new website homepage as an image using a laptop & projector.*

1. "How should Facebook pages be organized?" *(Begin with a general discussion of Facebook: by country, academic discipline, time of year, length of study? We are interested in their intuitive expectations with Facebook -- a resource with very limited design)*
2. *Now show them our Facebook page -- begin with our corporate page.* "What would you want to look at or do or go to on this page and why? And what is missing?" *(Be prepared to return to these questions as different panel members might take different directions to and from elements within Facebook.)*
3. *Migrate to a Facebook Country page: Spain.* Again, ask them: "Now, what would you want to look at or do or go to on this page and why? And what is missing?"
4. *Now show them the design of our new website homepage.* "What are your first impressions or thoughts about this website design for UCEAP?"
5. "Do you think the links meet your expectations or interests and needs for a study abroad website?" *(Again, probe with "What is missing or needed?"*)

D) Summary: "Let me summarize what I heard (to the 3 questions above):..."  "... Is this an adequate summary?" OR "How well have I captured what was said here?" OR "Did I correctly describe what was said?"  *Continue until the room is in agreement with your summary*

**Conclude:** Thank the members of the panel. You can let them know that we are from UCEAP and that we will be using their responses to inform our planning, program initiatives, & outreach efforts. Make certain to offer them a drink on their way out.
Appendix C: Images Displayed to Focus Group Subjects
Appendix D: Instructions for Moderators

Our project has one large goal of informing our strategic planning. Students are considered reliable sources to inform our strategic plan relating to considerations of:

4. study abroad for all, including an understanding of student access (or obstacles)
5. academic excellence, including academic integration and articulation
6. best business practices, including marketing tools

As these considerations are broad in nature, the challenge will be for the moderators to facilitate a discussion that can lead to new insights rather than an erratic and unproductive exchange between participants. A general question or two should prove sufficient to generate a prolonged active discussion on the subject, though the moderators will need to employ a few additional questions that not only interest the participants, but also get them to talk about subjects that interest UCEAP or the researchers.

By blending elements of unstructured and structured subjects of inquiry, the focus group should reflect a funnel that directs the focus group participants from one or two broad or open-ended questions to three or four core questions. The core questions should encourage a wide-ranging yet detailed discussion about items the research team is interested in exploring with participants with the goal of defined discussions of defined issues.

Focus Group Composition:

Our moderators, observers and analysts need to be fully informed of the composition of the focus group. A focus group is necessarily too small to compose results that reflect a random cross-section of society (as would some ideal survey) so the framing of questions and the analysis of responses need to consider the nature of the group.

One group will comprise students who are distinctly unfamiliar or less familiar with UCEAP (in order to target new market segments); the second group will comprise students who expressed an interest in the program but never enrolled (in order to evaluate recruitment/marketing efforts and better understand obstacles to participation in UCEAP).

Ideally, at each campus we would like to have two sessions of 10 participants (allowing for a few no-shows would leave us with 8 participants & we should have at a minimum six participants at each session); one session composed 50% of upper-division and 50% lower division students who have never applied to UCEAP; the other composed of students who at least initiated an application or otherwise expressed a strong interest in UCEAP. Additionally, as strangers often need to explain themselves to one another more than do acquaintances or friends, it would be our preference to recruit "strangers".

Focus Group Logistics:

Lacking a facility designed for focus group activity, we will need space for a moderator and up to 10 more people to be seated around a table. In the center of the table -- for all to see -- should be a audio recorder (batteries, electric cables, a backup device).
A few refreshments need to be on an additional table -- drinks, snacks. Food and drinks are important at focus groups, as eating together often helps people engage in conversation. These should be offered to participants when they show up and during the break. To encourage the humble, the moderator should be holding a drink when participants arrive.

An assistant should be present to greet participants along with the moderator. If observers cannot be in a separate area from the moderator and respondents one of them can serve as the assistant.

In general, the observers need to be in the background, yet close enough to hear, take notes, and forward critical questions -- should they arise -- through the assistant to the moderator.

**Methodology:**

We will be using the Funnel (moderate structure) paradigm mentioned above, beginning with broad questions and narrowing to the more specific issues. Questions need to be colloquial or conversational in style and tone, simple, clear (brief, reasonable, jargon free, one dimensional), and given in a logical sequence so as to not confuse the direction of the focus group. Moderators should avoid what they think are synonyms when presenting questions as words might mean different things to different audiences, and we are repeating these at several campuses.

**Session Introduction:**

The introduction offers instructions to the group, so as to manage expectations. Encourage all participant voices and a wide range of views; e.g., "respectful disagreement is healthy." Your role as the moderator is to listen to all the different things the group has to offer and to lead to questions as time permits.

Moderators often need to consider some "probing" to encourage participants to expand or explain subjects and ideas. Some examples of "probing" questions are:

- Who else has some thoughts about this--maybe something a little different?
- What else have people experienced in this area?
- You've been discussing several different ideas; what haven't we heard yet?
- Remember, we want to hear all your opinions; who has something else or related?

It is recommended that we avoid the use of the word "you" when employing probing participants; this avoids singling out or having anyone feel singled out (sometimes a silent person is legitimately silent). The moderator needs to keep the goals of the session as a "group goal". If it is necessary to interrupt to regain the control and focus of the group, the introduction of yourself and role as the moderator should allow for such with example of key phrases being something akin to:

- "Let me jump in here... We need to get on to our next question so as to finish on time. So, now I'd like you to consider..."
- "As I mentioned at the beginning, I think I need to break in here so that we can cover our agenda..."
Appendix E: Costs of Focus Group Research

In support of the University of California’s public accountability and transparency initiative, and to document and learn of the direct financial costs associated with this research, we provide below a summary of expenses related to conducting the focus groups. As is evident, the largest expense (60%) was related to participant incentives and some modest snacks which are essential to building a welcoming and comfortable environment for participants. Total costs at UC Los Angeles ($415) and UC Santa Barbara ($435) were nearly identical. Again, we have to acknowledge the generous support of the campuses in arranging facilities and recruiting participants as these are often significant costs associated with focus groups which were dramatically reduced by their contributions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Cost Per Unit</th>
<th>Item Total $</th>
<th>Item Total as % of Total Costs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Travel</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lodging &amp; Per Diem</td>
<td>491.08</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transportation, Fuel, Parking</td>
<td>564.48</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sub-Total Lodging &amp; Travel</strong></td>
<td>$1,056</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Participant Incentives</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gift Certificates</td>
<td>$25</td>
<td>$1,550</td>
<td>54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant Snacks</td>
<td>$196</td>
<td>$1,746</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sub-Total Participant Incentives</strong></td>
<td>$1,746</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Facilities &amp; Supplies</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Campus Facility Rental</td>
<td>$0</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recording</td>
<td>$93</td>
<td>$93</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sub-Total Facilities &amp; Supplies</strong></td>
<td>$93</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL COSTS</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>$2,895</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cost Per Participant (N=62)</strong></td>
<td>$47</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>